

# Showtime in Las Vegas

David Cartwright visits the bright lights of Las Vegas to pick out some of the frame highlights in the first part of our coverage of Vision Expo West

**T**he saying goes: 'What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas'. However, in this case, what is on show at Vision Expo West is certainly worth sharing with others. Vision Expo West, an annual exhibition and conference serving the West Coast of the US, was held from September 6-8 at the Sands Expo Convention Centre. As with everything in Las Vegas, the centre is large and impressive, situated between two of the city's premium hotels, the Palazzo and the Venetian.

Las Vegas is billed as the world's largest party venue, with some 37 million visitors annually, four million of which are attending a conference. It is home to 15 of the world's largest 25 hotels and while most of us associate Las Vegas with gambling, there is a lot else to do with a huge variety of restaurants, bars, clubs, shows,

shopping and day trips to the Grand Canyon and Death Valley. Love or hate the glamour and the bright lights, Las Vegas is well set up to host a conference.

Vision Expo has over 17,000 attendees with 475 exhibitors representing 5,000 brands. Outside the main exhibition hall there is a continuing education programme that packs out auditoriums. The majority



- 1 Bevel 0163
- 2 Koali by Morel
- 3 Epping by PQ Eyewear
- 4 Caulfield by Drift Eyewear



Rex Features

of attendees are from the US but with an international flavour from many other countries. Relatively few attend from the UK at present and, given the convenience of international travel, the programme on offer and the lure of Las Vegas, it is surprising that more do not make the trip. Where else could you end your exhibition/CET day and walk out to be confronted by a newly married wedding couple being serenaded by a gondolier on the Venetian Grand Canal?

### Show of strength

The show is a joint venture between Reed Exhibitions and The Vision Council, who bill this as a one-stop shop where delegates are able to learn about clinical issues, business and technology and then go on to the exhibition floor to fulfil their buying needs. Exhibitors confirm that the attendees come to the show to purchase goods.

'The power of the event lies in the volume of eye care professionals who see Vision Expo as the source for new products, technologies and education,' commented Tom Loughran, vice president of Reed Exhibitions. 'It's an investment that will keep their practices current and allow them to



5 Fysh 3465  
6 Bobbi by TC Charlton Eyewear  
7 JC Isis by A&A Optical  
8 Fysh 3468



provide superior products and services.'

The organisers were pleased with increasing attendance over last year, in view of the still fragile US economy. Exhibitors on the whole were encouraged, commenting that visitors come to shop, not to look, and sales were good. For their part, attendees reported that practice sales were holding up well, even increasing. The only concern was that consumers might be distracted by the forthcoming US presidential election and business would drop.

## The exhibition

Historically, it has been suggested that the US trails Europe with its frame styling and fashion. This appears to have shifted and now the exhibitors were displaying the very latest in terms of design and manufacture.

UK designer and frame company owner Tom Davies commented: 'In line with their expectation for individual service, many US consumers expect the very latest, cutting edge designs and so this is what their eye care professional want to see at shows.'

The exhibition showcases frames in three distinct areas. The main floor features the majority of exhibitors, while the Galleria area on the main floor gives a trendy boutique feel for a more individual setting. This gives new companies the opportunity to showcase their product. For more established premier brands, selling high-end product, two separate floors of the adjacent Venetian Hotel are set aside, allowing a very luxurious and relaxed setting.

## The suites

In the suites area, PQ Eyewear showed the A frame range, an original exploration into eyewear, designed by

Ron Arad, who is a widely recognised as one of the most influential art and architecture designers of his generation. PQ Eyewear is defined by innovation, superior quality and precision hand-crafting. The A-Frame features an A-shaped wire structure into the middle of the frame. Raise or lower the bar that runs across the centre of the A and you can move the two lenses and their frames closer together or further away, to give a perfect fit. The wire that forms the A shape is also the material for the sprung hinges.

New York eyewear brand Bevel has introduced a beta hinge to its acetate frames. The one-piece beta strap extends through the core, adding flex and a very distinctive design detail. The hinge has previously featured on the company's pure titanium and combination frames and a patent has been applied for. The hinge and core are coloured with a contrasting colour, giving the temple an aesthetically appealing appearance. Bevel exhibited eight new acetate frames, three having the new beta hinge, in a mix of ultramatt and hand-polished colours including orchid/ice blue, cherry straw, and turquoise linen.

Richard Mewha, president of Bevel, commented: 'Reaction from the market has been very positive so far. The hinge is as important to us in terms

of branding and design as it is to the utility and function aspect.'

Also in the suites area, in line with its high end positioning, Gold & Wood showcased rimless hand-made exotic woods and gold mount frames. Gold and Wood's Serpent range is inspired by the jeweller Boucheron, and features a snake, the symbol of the infinite cycle of life and protector, delicately cast on the front of the frame.

## Colours, shapes and materials

The predominant words used at the show to describe frames were retro and vintage, with many manufacturers taking the basic retro shapes and adding their own individual styles by accentuating the shape, using different materials and with a huge variety of colours.

Morel exhibited its Koali range, taking inspiration in design from natural elements such as bamboo, flowers and coral. This has produced a vibrant collection with intricate detail on the sides.

Also featured from Morel was the Lightec range manufactured from surgical grade stainless steel. All frames have a robust exclusive double-action spring-hinge and feature a screwless side design.

Victory Eyewear, based in New Jersey, was re-introducing classic American looks from its collections



**9** For All Mankind by Modo  
**10** D03 by Gold & Wood  
**11** Koali Bamboo by Morel  
**12** Beach Baby Blue by Babiators

from the 1940s, 50s, 60s, and 70s. The frames use authentic materials and the original designs. Each frame has the trademark 'V' logo plaque located in the right temple tip.

Fysh, based in Quebec, Canada, uses fun and creative textures, innovative materials and bright colours. Inspired by the beauty and freedom of the sea, many of the frames feature distinctive sides and are designed with a modified oval eyeshape with enough depth for a progressive lens.

In keeping with current fashion trends, Teka Eyewear frames are creative and exude vitality. These frames are said to appeal to the classy, fashion-savvy customer base by incorporating sleek sophistication into the temple and frame shape design. Materials used include top quality buffalo horn, exotic wood, aluminium, and leather.

## Children

Many stands at the show reflect a greater emphasis on specialist children's frames and sun protection in comparison to the UK.

Babiators is a brand that offers durable, flexible rubber frames, principally as sun protection for ages six months to seven years, but which can also be used for prescription needs. These come with a one-year 'lost and found' guarantee, that if the glasses are lost or broken in the first year, they will be replaced.

'We created Babiators because we know that habits form at a young age, and we wanted to promote a healthy habit of wearing sunglasses to help protect children's eyes,' commented Carolyn Guard, co-founder of Babiators. 'Not only do these glasses shield little ones from UV rays, they are also fun, unique and vibrantly

coloured so that children love wearing them and parents can rest at ease knowing they are doing their part to promote healthy vision.'

Miraflex exhibited its Flexible & Safe collection of 11 models in 20 colours, designed for babies and children aged from approximately three months to eight years. The frames are manufactured from a lightweight and flexible plastic material to permit wearing comfort and optimum adjustment.

The frames have no metal parts and hinge-free temples, drastically reducing the risk of facial and eye trauma. The nose bridge is anatomically designed to distribute the weight of the frame and lenses across a larger surface to further increase wearing comfort. A special adjustable and electronically welded head band keeps the frame snugly in place to improve optical correction and occlusion treatment.

## UK influence

British designer Tom Davies exhibited his ready-to-wear, bespoke and customised range using materials including buffalo horn, titanium and premium cotton acetate. A feature of his current designs is comfort and reducing weight without sacrificing looks.



'The US consumer is asking for frames to be as light as possible without compromising looks, and so we are taking every opportunity to save weight by looking at each aspect of design and the use of innovative materials,' commented Davies. 'Both customers and practitioners are responding well to this.'

The UK was further represented by William Morris. The show marked a special occasion for the company with the agreement of a distribution partnership with Classique Eyewear, based in San Diego. 'At 3.79 million square miles and with over 314 million people, the US is indeed a big step for us, and we plan to have 44 reps covering the 52 states within two years,' said Robert Morris managing director of William Morris. 'The value of this British brand is its heritage, something that the American audience really understands and is easily communicated, so we have great expectations.'

The theme of the company's stand was London and the props included bowler hats, top hats and Union Jack shopping bags. Product on show included new super-thin designs in colours taken from London fashion week – blue, purple and crystal Havana.



## Vision Expo West

### Eco credentials

Many of the exhibitors in Las Vegas had an ecological or charitable connection to their brand.

Modo Eyewear's long running Eco range now features 37 styles of metal and plastic frames with an emphasis on colour and retro design. The frames are made up of 95 per cent recycled materials and purchasers receive an envelope to donate unwanted spectacles to people in need, while for each frame sold Modo plants a tree in Cameroon.

'The range of products has been created with a focus on design, innovation and colours,' commented Alessandro Lanaro, CEO and founder of Modo. 'From our super thin plastics to our surgical steel flexible temples, we are offering the best innovations in eyewear combined with trendy shapes and colours.'

Other frames on show from Modo included the 7 For All Mankind lifestyle brand that fuses the world of denim and culture. The collection features seven sunglasses, including cat's eyes and oversized aviators with lamination details reminiscent of art deco architecture in Los Angeles. The eight ophthalmic frames are in classic black and tortoise as well as vibrant

plum, ruby and topaz tones.

Drift Eyewear, based in Chicago, was exhibiting its new Delta Blues collection in the Galleria area. Drift designs and hand crafts all aspects of its products, using sustainably sourced materials and reclaimed woods. Each frame consists of five layers of wood forming laminated temples, with a steel core insert and acetate fronts. The wood is waterproof and UV inert, meaning they will not be affected by sun fading or being left in the rain.

The Delta Blues collection is inspired by the logging camps of the early 1900s. Loggers would float fallen timber down the river and the densest of these logs would sink to the bottom. After being submerged for a hundred years, the timber has been pulled up and milled down to make these unique frames. The name Delta Blues, stems from the music of this same era. Musicians would travel from camp to camp and play for the loggers. As they travelled to each camp, their sound evolved and was influenced further. Drift donates \$10 of every Delta Blues frame sold to the Music Maker Foundation, a charitable organisation that helps struggling musicians get aid and find work.



15

### Customer targeting

TC Charton Eyewear is said to be the first eyewear collection in the US designed ergonomically specifically to fit the features of Asian faces. Asian Americans represent one of the most highly educated and affluent group of consumers in the US, with a population of about 15 million. The aim is to offer Asian American consumers eyewear that is not only reflective of US styles, but also truly fits them. The range reflects simplicity and incorporates the need for practicality in everyday living. The colours are chosen to complement Asian skin tones and the materials are of the finest quality.

CEO-V exhibited its concept for a practical pair of business glasses. Innovative Vision frames fold flat and



15

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- 13 Eco Chicago by Modo
- 14 Hemisphere Sun by Adlens
- 15 Hemisphere by Adlens



the case is slightly curved and fits flat into a jacket pocket. The ear tips are slightly indented for those who want to slide the frame down their nose. The design also features a patented system that allows the glasses to be worn around the neck without the need for a cord or chain. The sides extend to form a loop round the neck which is secured with a small magnetic clip.

## Technology

Adlens, based in Oxford, UK, was a first-time visitor to the exhibition with its unique product that, judging by the reaction of attendees, will receive considerable attention wherever it is sold. Adlens has two basic products – Hemisphere and Emergensee – both of which use interesting technology.

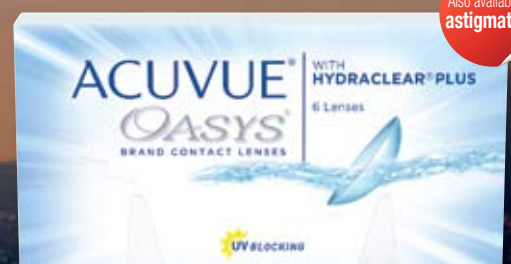
The Hemisphere features fluid filled lenses that enable instant vision with the turn of a dial with a range of spherical powers covering -4.5D to +3.5. This is achieved by the lens having a rigid scratch-resistant front and back, but with a flexible internal membrane. The amount of fluid injected regulates the power. After the prescription has been set, the lens is sealed, the frame adjusted and it is ready to wear. The technology is

available in two frame designs – the Hemisphere and a round version available in a range of colours. This technology was developed in the 1990s at Oxford University and has been developed more recently by Adlens for the commercial market.

CEO and executive chairman Michael Ferrara commented: 'Although we've sold around 100,000 pairs of variable focus glasses worldwide, we are launching our new category of eyewear into an extremely demanding and sophisticated market. The trade has given us very positive feedback and this is translating into a good volume of sales. We know we have a lot to learn, but we take our innovation very seriously and have a long-term commitment to developing products that will create opportunities for optical retailers around the world.'

Adlens' Emergensee product uses overlapping lenses to create a range of spherical powers from -6D to +3D, with the turn of a dial on the side. The Emergensee is designed for use as a temporary spare pair and has interesting possibilities for disaster situations or simply where it is not possible to obtain prescription spectacles. ●

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\*Also available with ACUVUE® OASYS® for ASTIGMATISM. 1. Data on file JJVC 2012; survey with wearers of ACUVUE® OASYS® (n=1207) in UK, Russia, Germany, Italy, France and Poland; 81% of ACUVUE® OASYS® wearers agree that even towards the end of the day their lenses feel like they're not wearing any lenses at all. 2. JJVC data on file 2007; Equal comfort wearing ACUVUE® OASYS® in one eye and no lens in the other. Open label, 4 week study, 35 neophytes aged 40-60. Comfort assessed 1 & 4 weeks compared to baseline (no lens). ACUVUE®, ACUVUE® OASYS®, SEE WHAT COULD BE® and HYDRACLEAR® are registered trademarks of Johnson & Johnson Medical Ltd. © Johnson & Johnson Medical Ltd 2012.